

61.

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
BUILDINGS
AND
IMPROVEMENTS
OF
LONDON.



———— Nil fuit unquam
Sic impar. Hor.

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CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS, &c.

NOTHING seems more capable of affording satisfaction to a liberal mind, than the many public improvements of elegance and convenience which have been lately made in this metropolis. Every inhabitant participates of their advantages, and every man of generous feelings shares in the reputation which his country acquires from them. Perhaps then it is the right of every individual to discuss with decent freedom the merits and demerits of public works, and even of private undertakings as far as they relate to public ornament. A discussion of this sort may serve to turn men's atten-

tion to these subjects, and be the means of introducing a greater correctness of taste for the future.

I have ever looked upon it as a peculiar happiness, that all public improvements must among us spring originally from the spirit of the people, and not from the will of the prince. In the one case, whenever they are fairly begun, they never fail to be carried on with unremitting zeal and activity: while in the other, they generally have their beginning and end with the monarch who protects them. Of this last, a striking example is seen in France. Lewis the XIVth, a prince fond of glory, pompous and enterprizing, who aimed at, and well-nigh obtained for his country, universal dominion in the arts and sciences, as well as in arms, was the first of the French monarchs who turned his attention this way. He cut canals, extended public roads, and established regular posts throughout his kingdom. He regulated the
police

police of his capital, and he added to its commodiousness and its decoration, by lighting and a better manner of paving its streets. There he stopt; and there the nation stopt with him. France, at this day, is just as far advanced in those articles as she was a century ago. To instance in one of those more minute conveniences, which by its frequent use becomes of some importance: Their post-chaifes, which were then so justly admired, now appear, after the improvements of England, as clumsy and incommodious as the boots of their postillions. Even the lamps of Paris, which the poets of those days compared to the planets themselves, “ pendent from the vault of “ heaven,” are now discovered, by travellers who have seen the illuminations of London, to be no more than a few scattered tin lanthorns hung by packthread in the middle of narrow and dirty streets.

But this very national spirit in England, which, once being put in action, exerts itself with so much vigour and effect, finds however, at first, a terrible enemy in vulgar prejudice, which must be overcome before it can fairly act. In an arbitrary state, a prince, a minister, may have his eyes opened to the errors of a former system, and immediately adopt a new one, without restraint: but with the multitude it requires time; they seldom reason, and it is to their feelings you must apply. Habit sanctifies every thing with them; and even that deformity to which they are accustomed, becomes beauty in their eyes. *As fine as London upon the bridge*, was formerly a proverbial saying in the city: and many a serious sensible tradesman used to believe that heap of enormities to be one of the seven wonders of the world, and next to *Solomon's temple* the finest thing that ever art produced. When first the reformation in the streets was begun, from
the

the same cause every nuisance had its advocate. It was said to be for the ease of the horses, that the midway should be paved with huge shapeless rocks, and the foot-path with sharp pebbles for the benefit of the feet. The posts were defended to the last; and the pulling down of the signs, which choaked up and disgraced the streets, regretted as a barbarous invasion on the monuments of national taste: the cat and fiddle, goose and gridiron, and the like, being regarded as the greatest efforts of inventive genius; and Cheapside often compared to the Medicean gallery, for its choice collection of paintings; blue boars, green dragons, and kings heads.

But though we claim a right, from prescription, to laugh at the bad taste of our neighbours in the city*, I am
afraid

* The bad taste of the city is a trite subject, and any strictures upon their former public management in those matters are hardly applicable at present. At least, one would hope the season is now over when the citizens, before they
approve

afraid our pretensions to superiority in the west end of the town are founded more upon presumption than truth.

We have indeed in the new buildings avoided many of the

approve of a plan, require to know if the author is of the livery, or if his creed is according to law. But the following anecdote of what happened forty years ago is told, and may not be unacceptable to the reader :

When it was first resolved in the common-council to build a mansion house for the Lord Mayor ; Lord Burlington, zealous in the cause of the arts, sent down an original design of *Palladio*, worthy of its author, for their approbation and adoption. The first question in court was not, whether the plan was proper, but whether this same *Palladio* was a Freeman of the city or no. On this, great debates ensued ; and it is hard to say how it might have gone, had not a worthy deputy risen up, and observed gravely, that it was of little consequence to discuss this point, when it was notorious that *Palladio* was a papist, and *incapable* of course. Lord Burlington's proposal was then rejected *nem. con.* and the plan of a Freeman and a Protestant adopted in its room. The man pitched upon (who afterwards carried his plan into execution) was originally a shipwright ; and, to do him justice, he appears never to have lost sight of his first profession. The front of his mansion house has all the resemblance possible to a deep laden Indiaman, with her stern galleries and gingerbread work. The stairs and passages within are all ladders and gangways, and the two *bulkheads* on the roof, fore and aft,

the palpable inconveniences of old London ; which precaution, has perhaps bestowed collateral ornament without any primary intention on our parts. But have we succeeded in displaying a more refined taste, wherever beauty and elegance were the principal objects in view ? To be satisfied in this, let us examine our so-much-vaunted squares.

The notion I form to myself of a perfect square, or public *place* in a city, is a large opening, free and unincumbered, where not only carriages have room to turn and pass, but even where the people are able to assemble occasionally without confusion. It should appear to open naturally out of the street, for which reason all the avenues should form *radii* to the centre of the place. The not unaptly represent the binacle and winlafs on the deck of a great north country *catt*,

“ Vous etes, je l’avoue, ignorant charpentier ;

“ Mais pas un habile architecte.”

fides

fides or circumference should be built in a stile above the common ; and churches and other public edifices ought to be properly introduced. In the middle there ought to be some fountain, groupe, or statue, railed in within a small compass, or perhaps only a basin of water, which, if not so ornamental, still, by its utility in cases of fire, &c. makes ample amends. To illustrate this in some degree, I refer to St. James's square, which, though far from perfect in that stile, and altogether uncompleted on one side, still strikes the mind (I judge from my own feelings) with something of more ease and propriety than any square in London. You are not confined in your space ; your eye takes in the whole compass at one glance, and the water in the middle seems placed there for ornament and use.

But almost every other square in London seems formed on a quite different plan ; they are gardens, they are parks, they are sheep-walks, in short they are every thing
but

but what they should be. The *rus in urbe* is a preposterous idea at best; a garden in a street is not less absurd than a street in a garden; and he that wishes to have a row of trees before his door in town, betrays almost as false a taste as he that would build a row of houses for an avenue to his seat in the country.

To descend next to particulars, and observe in what manner the absurdity of this taste is aggravated or extenuated in the consequent practice, let us begin with Grosvenor square, which is generally held out as a pattern of perfection in its kind. It is doubtless spacious, regular, and well-built; but how is this spaciousness occupied? A clumsy rail, with lumps of brick for piers, to support it, at the distance of every two or three yards, incloses nearly the whole area, intercepting almost entirely the view of the sides, and leaving the passage round it as narrow as most streets,

with the additional disadvantage at night of being totally dark on one hand. The middle is filled up with bushes and dwarf trees, through which a statue peeps, like a piece of gilt gingerbread in a green-grocer's stall.

Cavendish square next claims our regard: the apparent intention here was to excite pastoral ideas in the mind; and this is endeavoured to be effected by cooping up a few frightened sheep within a wooden pailing; which, were it not for their footy fleeces and meagre carcases, would be more apt to give the idea of a butcher's pen,

————— “*passimque armenta videbant*

“*lautis balare carinis,*”

To see the poor things starting at every coach, and hurrying round and round their narrow bounds, requires a warm imagination indeed, to convert the scene into that of
flocks

flocks ranging the fields, with all the concomitant ideas of innocence and a pastoral life.

“Some filly fwain, more filly than his sheep,

“Which on the flow’ry plains he used to keep,”

must have first conceived the design; and it might have yet been improved, by a thought taken from one of the most flagrant perversions of taste that ever was exhibited to publick view. Stanislaus, titular king of Poland, and little better than imaginary duke of Lorrain, contrived, at his fine palace of Luneville, in one of the richest and most delightful countries in Europe, full of real pastoral objects and rustick images, to degrade them by sticking up clock-work mills, wooden cows, and canvass milkmaids, all over his grounds; to the no small admiration of the Lorrainers, an honest race, better fitted for the enjoyments of a mild and equitable government, than for the relish of works of taste. Now, however ridiculous

this might appear in the park at Luneville, it is a precious thought for Cavendish square. Imitation here would appear with greater propriety than nature itself. I would therefore recommend it to the next designer of country-in-town, to let all his sheep be painted. And I think if a paste-board mill, and tin cascade, were to be added it would compleat the rural scene.

As to Hanover square, I do not know what to make of it. It is neither open nor inclosed. Every convenience is railed out, and every nuisance railed in. Carriages have a narrow ill-paved street to pass round in, and the middle has the air of a cow-yard, where blackguards assemble in the winter, to play at hussle-cap, up to the ancles in dirt. This is the more to be regretted, as the square in question is susceptible of improvement at a small expence. The buildings are neat and uniform. The street from Oxford road falls with a gentle descent into
the

the middle of the upper side, while, right opposite, George street retires, converging to a point, which has a very picturesque effect; and the portico of St. George's church, seen in profile, enriches and beautifies the whole.

Red Lion square, elegantly so called, doubtless, from some alehouse formerly at the corner, has a very different effect on the mind. It does not make us laugh; but it makes us cry. I am sure, I never go into it without thinking of my latter end. The rough sod that "heaves in many a mouldering heap," the dreary length of the sides, with the four watch-houses, like so many family vaults, at the corners, and the naked obelisk that springs from amidst the rank grass, like the sad monument of a disconsolate widow for the loss of her first husband, form, all together, a *memento mori*, more powerful to me than a death's head and cross marrow bones: and were but the parson's bull to be seen bellowing at the gate, the idea

of a country church-yard in my mind would be complete.

To forbear descanting any longer upon the particular defects of each square, it suffices to say, that they are all, more or less, tinged with the same absurdity, an awkward imitation of the country, amid the smoke and bustle of the town. Yet one is almost disposed to excuse Lincoln's-inn square. The vast extent of the field, still further extended by the proximity of the gardens, the lofty trees in prospect, the noble piece of water in the middle, all conspire to create an illusion, and we feel ourselves as it were fairly beguiled into the country, in the very centre of business and care. That of which I chiefly complain is the attempt to introduce rural ideas where there is not the least probability of attaining the ends. The royal parks adjoining to London by no means fall under this censure. These, with the many delightful fields

fields which skirt this capital, render it unrivaled in situation; and, what is peculiar, they are all within the reach, and open to the health and amusement, of the inhabitants: a circumstance which renders the mock-parks in the middle of the town still more unnecessary and absurd.

In thus endeavouring to expose a particular vicious taste that has hitherto prevailed in this end of the town, we ought not to omit doing justice, at the same time, to the general system of improvement, that has already, in a great measure, taken place*. Our streets are now
wide,

* The reader perhaps may not be displeased to have before him, the following passage from Tacitus, relating to the improvements in rebuilding Rome after the conflagration in Nero's time, that he may compare the ideas of that age with what has been lately pursued here: "Dimensis vicorum ordinibus, et latis viarum spatiis cohibita ædificiorum altitudine, ac patefactis areis additisque porticibus, quæ frontem insularum protegerent."—"Ædificiaque ipsa certa sui parte, sine trabibus, saxo Gabino Albinoque, solidarentur, quod is lapis igni impervius est. Jam aqua, privatorum licentia
" intercepta

wide, straight, and commodious ; and although neatness, more than magnificence, seems to be the characteristick of the buildings, they do not fail on the whole to produce a grand effect. Prejudice from habit, or veneration for the errors of our forefathers, has had no share in the faults into which we are fallen at the western end of the town ; nay it may be rather suspected, that an injudicious and even studious avoiding of every thing that bore resemblance to the antient city, led to the abuse of which

“ intercepta, quo largior et pluribus locis in publicum flueret, custodes et
 “ subsidia reprimendis ignibus in propatulo quisque haberet: nec com-
 “ munione parietum, sed propriis quæque muris ambirentur. Ea ex utili-
 “ tate accepta decorum quoque novæ urbi attulere.” Tacit. Annal. lib. XV.
 i. 43.

“ The streets were (now) made regular and wide, the height of the houses
 “ limited, with areas and porticos in front ; nor was timber used in their exterior
 “ parts, but stone only. Public reservoirs of water were provided in various
 “ places, and persons to assist in extinguishing fires appointed, and every
 “ edifice had its distinct party walls. These regulations, though dictated
 “ by utility, did not fail to give beauty also to the new city.”

we here complain. This, it must be admitted, is the period in which judgment and taste seem to go hand in hand in the nation. Nobility, gentry, and citizens, are emulous in the encouragement of arts; and a general spirit prevails for correcting antient errors and establishing new improvements.

“Aurea nunc, olim sylvestribus horrida dumis.”

Every session of parliament is now marked by some bill for the inclosing of commons, cutting of canals, constructing of bridges, embanking of rivers, making, mending, and watering, of highways; and for the paving and lighting of streets. Much has been done in London; and much still remains to be done. The act obtained last session for the parish of Marybone, opens a vast field, which, I hope, will be cultivated with care. The sheep are already turned grazing from Cavendish square, and a

statue is to be put in their place*. Why then should not the inhabitants seize the opportunity of levelling their rotten pailing, and bestowing every embellishment on the
area

* Since these sheets were written, the statue has been erected, and it is now unveiled to publick view. Gratitude for past favours is a generous sentiment, and does honour to the breast that possesses it; but this does not preclude a criticism on the manner in which it is expressed. The statue in question is then the deed of private friendship, and (as the inscription takes care to inform us, to prevent mistakes) is an equestrian statue. An officer, in the exact *modern* uniform of the guards, is mounted on an *antique* horse, all very richly gilt and burnished. The figure, both in features and proportions, is extremely like the original; and so, I am told, is the hat. The general encomium bestowed upon it is, that it is *mighty natural*; but in my opinion, the resemblance would be much stronger, were it, in place of being gilt, to be painted in proper colours, the coat scarlet, the facings blue, and the lace to remain as it is. This would not only make it more *natural*, but also render it of use as a pattern suit for the regimental tailors.

The character of the inscriptive style is brevity, perspicuity, and force; and there is also a system of contraction established, different from those of a law bill. The reader will be able to judge how far this character is retained in the following inscription: I have distinguished it with italicks in some particular parts;

area of which the place will admit? But this is not all. I wish the same spirit to extend universally. Our squares are in general inhabited by the great and opulent, who

W—— D—— of C——

Born April 15th 1721, Died 31st October 1765.

This *Equestrian Statue*

was erected by

Lieutenant General

W—— S——

In Gratitude

For *his private Kindness*

In Honour

To *his* publick Virtue,

November the 4th *Anno Domini* 1770.

The possessive pronoun *his* is very happily introduced here, because it may be applied to either of the antecedent persons, and will no doubt create subject of learned dispute some ages hence. If this fashion should prevail among great men and rich, of erecting publick statues, to those who have been *kind* to them in *private*, it is not warriors in compleat uniform, bestriding gilded steeds, who would be most frequently seen in our streets and squares, but beauty simple, *unadorned*, like the Venus of Medicis, and (could art do justice to nature in this country) finer forms than ever Grecian chizzle graved.

are surely in a condition to finish them as they ought to be, for their own convenience, and the honour of the metropolis. It is a pleasure to observe the attention to every circumstance of embellishment, that goes hand in hand with all their improvements at Bath: there, uniformity, beauty, and convenience, are every where attended to; and even the undertakings of individuals upon the principle of private emolument only, (such is the happy spirit of the place) are always contrived to add to the honour and benefit of the public. Their squares, though they shame the metropolis, support the reputation of the nation in general, for elegance and propriety of taste *. It is impossible at this day to give the public

places

* The circus at Bath, although elegant on the whole, seems to me faulty in one respect. If, instead of the three Grecian orders, there had only been one employed; the columns to have sprung from a basement of one story, and to have reached beyond the Attick, with proper capitals and entablatures, I think it would have produced a better effect. The idea of the dif-

ferent

places of London, the same forms, or the same beauty, with those of Bath; but, as they now stand, they are capable of being so improved and adorned, as to render them on the whole, including the circumstance of number and size, superior to what can be met with in any other city in Europe. If this were once effected, London could boast of fifteen elegant squares (besides market-places and inns of court), while Paris, her proud rival, cannot shew half so many that deserve the name. The *Place de Louis Quinze* is not yet finished, and probably never will; and the *Place Royale*, the next in size and grandeur, may be compared to one of our second rate squares, with many of the defects in the worst. In this country there is nothing wanting but to undertake; the

ferent orders was taken (I suspect) from the amphitheatre of Flavius, called the *Collosseo* at Rome; but what is truly magnificent, and perhaps necessary, in so stupendous a fabrick, becomes rather trifling when reduced to the scale of a dwelling house.

power to execute, in an affluent, active and enterprising people, knows no bounds. We even see in smaller states what great things have been accomplished with small means. The kings of Prussia have rendered Berlin a noble and splendid capital; and even the king-duke of Lorraine, whose wretched taste in gardening has been taken notice of, had the good fortune to be better directed in his public works: he has made the new town of *Nancy* the most elegant city on this side of the Alps.

But there are many objects in London improveable to any pitch of perfection: we have in Oxford road the outlines of the noblest street in Europe. In length, width and straightness, it surpasses every thing of its kind, and requires only to be adorned with "gorgeous palaces and solemn temples," like the *Corso* at Rome, or the *Strada Nuova* at Genoa, to eclipse them both in fame. Nor is

it arrogance to expect this : a passion for building in town seems to arise among the nobility at present ; how many handsome structures then, may there not be erected along those sides, where at present there are only stables and timber-yards ! The new pavement, which goes on with rapidity, sets this street in a new point of view. Already there is begun in it one public edifice (the Pantheon) of bold and elegant design ; and there is a scheme on foot, for building a new church in Marybone parish. It is to be hoped this desirable work will not be huddled into a bye corner ; but appear as it ought, with a magnificence proper for the religious worship of an opulent people ; and that it will be not only a noble object in itself, but contribute to the general ornament, by being placed in Oxford street.

On a supposition then that men of rank and fortune should hereafter be induced to rear up their mansions in

Oxford

Oxford road; it may not be presumptuous to hint at some errors which have been too commonly adopted in fabricks of that fort. To such, a gateway with a spacious court within, is both stately and commodious; but the front to the street should still present something that intimates a relation to the society in which you live; a dead wall of twenty or thirty feet high, run up in the face of your neighbours, can only inspire horror and dislike. I am sorry upon this subject to instance Burlington house. How many are there, who have lived half a century in London, without knowing that so princely a fabrick exists. It has generally been taken for a jail. None, I am confident, ever passed under its gloomy wall, late at night, without thinking of ghosts, robbery, and murder. The formidable entrance, that betrays no marks of *humanity*, but what are daubed over the doors, recalls to the imagination

—“ Thrice

— “Thrice threefold the gates

“*Impenetrable,*” —

the character Milton gives to those gates, of which the keepers were *Sin and Death*. There is however this much to be said in excuse of my Lord Burlington, that he built his house at a time when Piccadilly was almost out of town. He had few neighbours, and those of the lowest rank. He possessed an ample space of ground. He laid it off in garden, erected a house in the middle, and ran up a wall before him shaded with trees ; and then hugged himself in his retreat, as if he had been a hundred miles from London. There is little doubt, from the correct taste of this Nobleman, that if he had lived till this day, he would have levelled his brick screen to the ground. But what can be said in excuse of those architects who, coming after him, without one spark of his genius, have

fervilely copied his defects. This cannot be more strongly exemplified than in Bingley house. It presents the same gloomy exterior as Burlington house, with this advantage, that its interior is correspondent in every respect. Bingley house is not a painted sepulchre. It has the merit of Chartres, to be without hypocrisy ; for he will not be deceived, who forms a notion from what he sees without, of what he is to expect within. It is strange that great men should not see the impropriety of this taste in a government like ours. It may procure respect in Algiers or Tunis ; but here it can only excite disgust. Disgust once conceived, the transition from the house to the owner is easy and natural ; and I will venture to pronounce (however whimsical it may appear), that he who thus immures himself in a free country, will hardly ever attain consideration or power. At Paris, the *Hotels* of the great are indeed all constructed with *Porte Cocheres* and courts ; at the bottom of which the grand apartments lie ;

lie ; but then the *Façades* to the street are gay and ornamented ; and their bandelied Swifs and powdered lacqueys at the gates, give the whole an air of life and intercourse with their fellow citizens, which must be agreeable every where. I do not recoommend their nine-pin column and bonnet roof ; but something surely might be borrowed from the taste of Paris to improve our own. Were examples at home to be quoted, worthy the imitation of those whose fortune enables them to attempt that style, I should mention Bloomsbury and Shelburn House. In these seem to be united, the gay, the useful, and the grand.

But there is another style, which has been a good deal affected by our great men of late, and is perhaps the most judicious for those who have no ground property in town. I mean what is called a street house. Many a nobleman, whose proud seat in the country is adorned with all the

riches of architecture, porticos, and columns, “ cornice and
“ frise with bossy sculpture grav’d,” is here content with
a simple dwelling, convenient within, and unornamented
without. This is pardonable where only a house is rented
for a winter residence, without any idea of property an-
nexed : but where a family mansion is intended to be
built, something ought to be produced suitable in dignity,
to the name it bears. When we hear of a Grafton house,
a Gower house, an Egremont house, we expect something
beyond roominess and convenience ; the meer requisites
of a packer, or a sugar baker. Would any foreigner,
beholding an insipid length of wall broken into regular
rows of windows, in St. James’s Square, ever figure from
thence the residence of the first duke of England ? “ All
“ the blood of all the Howards” can never ennoble Nor-
folk house.

It

It is not indeed required, as has been already allowed, that every nobleman should have a palace in London; all that is contended for, is, that when they think it necessary to build, they at least present us with something elegant in the design. It must be acknowledged that it is difficult, where decorations are attempted on a small subject, to hit the proper medium between simplicity and profusion of art. The one is apt to degenerate into meanness, the other into gewgaw. It is also highly essential to preserve a propriety in the character of your building, never running after ideas that are incompatible with its nature and use. To aim at grandeur where beauty is only attainable, is equally inexcusable with keeping solely to the latter, where the subject naturally elevates itself to the sublime. Indeed the ideas of the sublime, and of the beautiful, are so distinct in their nature and origin, and the proper subject of each so clearly

marked

marked out, that it is amazing to find them so generally misapplied. The front of St. Peter's at Rome (considering it apart from the colonade) has often been objected to, on this score. It is bold perhaps to carry the objection farther, and to say that this fault infects the whole. The sublime is certainly the principal idea which ought to be impressed by the appearance of that famous temple, which arrogates to herself, the title of the Queen-church of the Christian world: yet I believe it will be allowed by all those who have seen it, that its beauty is what first strikes the mind; and if ever any notion of its vastness is attained, it is by measure and deduction, and by comparison of its different parts. After this, I think, we may venture once more, in the face of authority and received opinion, to give an example of the opposite fault nearer at home: I mean in St. Paul's Covent garden. This church, from its moderate size and unimportance, although very susceptible of beauty, had no pretensions to sublimity.

What

What however has happened? The last is positively what alone was attempted. It was thought possible to give an air of grandeur, by rendering it simple and great in the parts; but, in effect, with its original littleness, and the extreme simplicity of the order, it sinks down very near to the character of a barn*. This perhaps is a digression; but to return to our street house. These sort of fabricks then, are incapable of much grandeur; but they admit of beauty in any degree. It is therefore this last which ought principally to be aimed at. An unity of order enriched

* It is commonly believed at this day, that Inigo Jones, whose superior genius shines conspicuous in all his other works, was cramped in his design for this church; and that, being confined to a certain expence, all he aspired at was to make it the finest *Barn* in England. This may serve as an excuse for the architect; but none for the age that received it as a temple, in the perfection of the Tuscan stile. Maundrell, a judicious and correct observer of those times, gives its plan and perspective, for the purpose of comparing it with the famous temple of the sun, at Balbeck, in Syria. It must however be acknowledged, that, by the happy manner of placing it, some effect is produced, in spite of the injudicious simplicity of the fabrick.

with

with ornament, in fair and high polished materials, is all that seems required. Nor are models of this sort wanting among us. The two houses lately erected by Mr. Tuffnell, in Cavendish square, are fine examples ; as is also that of Mr. Anson, in St. James's square. When once this last is compleated according to the plan, the public will be more able to do justice to the classic taste which directed it. In its present state, it is wonderfully beautiful, and will serve to convey the idea of what is here meant. It is in vain to urge expence against attempts in this way. The expence of adorning a front, can never be an object of consideration with a man of high rank, who finds himself in a condition to build a house ; when we see in fact, how much can be done by private gentlemen, who are blest with sound judgement, correct taste, and a liberal mind.

There is another object in London susceptible of the highest improvement, which has almost to this day lain
in

in total neglect. The Thames, the pride and *Palladium* of London, has hitherto been allowed to steal through the town, like Mr. Bays's army, in disguise, while the Seine, the Arno, and every ditch in Holland, are adorned with superb keys. However, the time seems at hand, when it is to emerge from its antient obscurity. Already two bridges, worthy of its waters, stretch gracefully from shore to shore; and the third, which has so long obstructed and dishonoured its stream, bids fair under the present enlightened system of the city to be soon removed. It may not be amiss to observe here, that Blackfryars bridge, to its own intrinsic merit, adds this concurrent advantage, of affording the best and perhaps the only true point of view for the magnificent cathedral of St. Paul's, with the various churches in the amphitheatre, that reaches from Westminster to the Tower.

The project of embanking also promises much for the embellishment and improvement of the river. Besides the benefit to navigation, it opens a vast field of reformation on the wharfs and keys. The works carrying on amid the antient ruins of Durham yard, is a sample of what may be done in that way; and from the terras of that stately pile we can best judge of the effect of so noble an object as the Thames properly displayed. You have here an extensive sweep of water with numberless gay images moving on its surface, two handsome bridges bound the unbroken prospect, while beyond, the various spires of the city, and of Westminster, appearing at a distance, add to the richness of the scene. Were but the embankment completely finished all along, it would depend solely on the inhabitants to have keys on the Thames, which none in Europe could rival either in beauty or extent.

Having

Having thus reviewed with freedom the imperfections and improvements of London, as it now stands, it may not be amiss to observe, that it is perhaps a piece of good fortune, that so much is left to be done in an age when taste has received so great a degree of refinement; and when the fine arts are more than ever protected by the great, and cultivated by the people*. The countenance they have lately received from the Sovereign himself, in the establish-

* The progress of the fine arts in this country has undoubtedly been rapid of late; and yet, were posterity to judge from one circumstance, they would conclude us to have been in a state of more than *Mummian* barbarism, in the year 1770. There is at this day an act of parliament in force, laying a tax on paintings imported, like tanned leather, at so much *per* foot. When Mummus took a receipt from the ship-master, who was to carry some of the choicest morsels of Grecian sculpture, from Corinth to Rome, obliging him to find as good in their place, should they be damaged or lost, this was only an act of a private man, and not of the senate of Rome. Indeed no captain of a ship need to scruple signing such a bill of lading for any of our public statues, if the elegant, chaste, characteristick, neglected *cast* of James the second in Priy-Gardens, were left out.

ment of the royal academy of painting, sculpture, and architecture, fixes them in a more solid form. But the spirit of the nation first drew them here, and it is this must support them at last. Already the society of arts, &c. whose plan is of the most generous and comprehensive kind, and whose success has created both enemies and imitators, the truest test of merit, had, by the honours and rewards they bestow, called up the latent seeds of genius in the nation, and cherished them in their after-growth. Already many individuals, by their labours, their studies, and researches abroad into the purest sources of the arts, had enriched our island with models of the most perfect kind. Italy was become, in a manner, our own; and even Greece, Syria, and Asia minor, hitherto unexplored, were made, for our use, to open their hidden treasures of the sublime and graceful *Antique*.

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With this stock of ideas so honourably acquired, what remains but to see them fully realized? Happily therefore there awaits them, two capital subjects, besides others of inferior consequence, to be executed in London. That which I esteem the first in order, of importance, is a Senate-house. This should not only comprehend every accommodation of ease and dignity for the two houses of parliament; but also include the courts of justice with their proper offices, that the oracles of law may no longer be delivered from wooden booths, run up in the corners of an old Gothick hall. Nothing more readily impresses strangers with reverence for the laws and government of a country, than the pomp and splendour which surround them. Who ever beheld the *Stadt-house* at Amsterdam, without conceiving a more respectful idea of the republic of Holland, than can be conveyed by the words. “High and Mighty,” repeated fifty times in a *Placaart*?

The next work to be undertaken, is a palace for our kings. The honour, the dignity of the nation demand it. How disgraceful to see the head of this mighty empire worse lodged than the *Gonfalioniere* of *San Marino*, or the chief magistrate of *Glaris* or *Zug* ! But it is not sufficient to have a mere royal house for the residence of the sovereign. In it should also be comprehended proper offices for the departments of the executive power, that are more immediately connected with the crown, such as those pertaining to the Privy-council, and the Secretaries of state ; the latter of which, are at present scattered in different corners of the town, and some of them hired by the week.

These objects, properly fulfilled, would add lustre to the crown, and weight to government. It is truly laughable to hear the expence mentioned as an argument
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against them, in a nation that has on many occasions thought light of bestowing ten times the sum necessary for these ends, in foreign subsidies, often employed by the princes who received them, to no better purpose, than patching up an old castle, or spouted away in *jet d'eau*s. I should imagine forty or fifty thousand pounds a year, sufficient for carrying on and completing those works: a sum which a moderate duty on a few articles of luxury alone, could easily raise. Not to mention numberless other untouched resources for so trifling a supply: the lotteries would furnish it with ease, since they are found by experience capable of producing annually two hundred thousand pounds clear, by a voluntary tax on the folly and superfluity of the people.

Besides these objects, which I deem to be capital and almost indispensable in the nation, there are various other works to be undertaken of importance and use. Another

bridge is certainly required. The different societies and academies have still an opportunity of displaying their taste in buildings proper for their reception and accommodation. Halls are wanted for many of the inferior courts of justice. Handsome chapels ought to be erected in the room of those miserable brick hovels, with belfries like the new invented cork-screw, which every where disgrace the new buildings; and in fine, new openings, new communications, and new decorations, are still requisite, almost in every quarter, to give this city the highest improvement it will bear *.

But with some men it is deemed little less than sacrilege to suggest any scheme for the embellishment or further aggrandizement of London, already overgrown in

* If the reader wishes to see a particular detail of the improvements, still wanting in this capital, he may consult Gwynn's *London and Westminster Improved*, the most judicious and well-digested plan that has been yet proposed.

their eyes. The argument on this topic commonly urged with the greatest triumph is, "That a large head is a certain indication of a weak and distempered body." Granting even the premises to be true (which I believe to be very controvertible), this is still concluding from metaphor; a species of reasoning fit to be employed with like success on either side. For example, one might with equal justice assert London to be the heart, which the more capacious it is found, and the freer the circulation through it, the more life and strength it imparts; and ingenious men might hit upon other allusions to parts of the human body, whose size commonly denotes vigour and health.

To leave therefore these metaphorical syllogisms, unknown in either logic or mathematicks; let us examine the most plausible objections that frequently occur on the subject. First, it is said, that great cities tend to the cor-

ruption of morals ; an objection serious and important, the more so that it is partly true. For it cannot be denied that where men congregate in large bodies, it gives more scope to the passions than in smaller societies. The manifold relations in which mankind then stand to one another, and the various combinations of interest among them, beget new situations, from which new vices must naturally arise : but from the same source do not the opposite virtues also flow ? Great societies are the field where only benevolence, generosity, charity, humanity, and all the train which are distinguished by the very name of *social* virtues, can fully exert themselves ; and where temperance, frugality, and all those of the æconomical tribe, can most unproblematically be shewn. If therefore the virtues bear proportion to the vices acquired, nothing is lost on the balance of accounts. It is the lot of humanity, not to be able to increase the one, without adding to the other at the same time.

It is different as to crimes which are cognizable by the laws. They unquestionably will be more frequent in great towns; but it is the business, and it is in the power of the laws, to controul them. Nor is there great cause of boasting for smaller societies, that they are more exempted from them. Mankind often dignify with the name of virtues, and even plume themselves upon, those qualities which are mere negations of vice. Thus honesty, in the common acceptation of the word, means no more than an abstaining from theft; a virtue not hard to practise where there is nothing to steal. Where property is small and equally divided, it is in little danger of being invaded. To say therefore that there are more thieves, in proportion, in London than in a *Tartar Hord*, is only saying that riches here are more abundant, and more unequally disposed.

But, as has been already observed, it is the duty of the magistrate, to watch over, and restrain, the disorders of the people ; and this is only to be effected by wholesome regulations, carried into execution by an active and vigilant police. Every other way is a solecism in politics. To reform a city by desolation, is like putting a man to death, to teach him better manners. Much indeed might be said on the imperfections of the police of London ; but this is matter foreign to the present discussion ; it may however be with justice remarked, that it is rather an argument against the comparative corruption of manners in this city, great out of all proportion to most others, that so few enormities are committed in it, where the regulations are so defective, the execution so feeble, and the populace so uncontrouled.

The next objection is founded upon the depopulation of the country, which great cities occasion ; but this,
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when considered in a political light, will be found of little force. In politicks it is not to be so much regarded, the succession of mankind, as the number at any period, which actually exist, and the manner in which they are employed. That cities, from their confined air, epidemick distempers, accidents, &c. are unfavourable to longevity, is not to be doubted; but do they not, on the other hand, encourage propagation, by the means they furnish for the providing of children, the employment they afford to industry, and the encouragement they continually offer to ingenuity of every kind *? How
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* The effect of hospitals and other public institutions of charity, on the manners of a people, is a subject curious and important; and yet it has never been fully discussed. That of an hospital for foundlings, in particular, deserves to be examined with the most scrupulous exactness. If it is found that such an institution begets a careless and improvident spirit among the people, and induces them, in general, to throw the charge of their offspring on the public, it is a dangerous thing. The loss of parental care can never be
made

many of the inhabitants of this populous country are there not maintained solely by ministring to the wants of the metropolis? Annihilate London then, and you leave these to starve at home, or drive them into foreign parts. Besides, the objection, if good against cities, is equally cogent against commerce, and industry, in all its various branches. The first sends thousands every year to perish at sea, or on unhospitable shores; and the last fixes them to a life of continued toil, which naturally tends to abridge their days. To give then the individual the best possible chance for health and long life, it is not sufficient that

made up to the child. The public is often a generous master, but never a tender nurse. For all further reflection on so nice a subject, I shall present my readers with an anecdote, no less amazing than true: That of all the children born at Paris, about one third is sent to the foundling hospital. Nothing could make this fact so commonly overlooked even by the French themselves, but its being repugnant to the natural feelings of mankind, and therefore not suspected; when every person may verify it, from the yearly lists published in the *Etrennes Mignonnes*. The last of these almanacks gives the baptisms for 1768: Total, 18576; *Enfans trouvés*, 6025.

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you rase your cities ; you must also abolish your manufactures, abandon your trade, burn your navy, and, in fine, reduce this numerous, flourishing, busy succession of men, called the British nation, to the small number of inhabitants, which the soil, rather ungrateful in itself, could naturally maintain, planted here like cabbage-stalks, and vegetating through the utmost length of years, without wants and without enjoyment.

There is another objection more generally urged, because it is not merely a matter of speculation, but an evil very sensibly felt : the enhanced price of the necessaries of life, which naturally results from the increased demand of a large town, and the increased difficulty of supplying it. It is alledged, this is destructive to manufactures, and oppressive on the poor, as well as injurious to people of moderate fortunes. To this might be replied, that it is in vain to attempt manufactures of the coarser or more

extensive kinds in a great city. None can naturally subsist there, but such as depend upon ingenuity more than labour; and such as are the objects of luxury and fashion, more than real use. These will always be well paid for, and maintained; but the others must and ought to seek out some distant corner, where provisions are in plenty, not enhanced by a long carriage, and consequently where labour is cheap. As to the inhabitants who live by their professions, or offices, or on their fortunes, they surely propose to themselves some peculiar advantage or pleasure, by their residence here. If they did not, instead of complaining, they would withdraw from the inconvenience, and the city would be reduced to its natural standard of course; but, while they stay, they must be content with the bad together with the good. For the first to complain of the dearth of living in London, is like a physician complaining of the expence of his carriage: and for the last, it is a tax upon their pleasures,

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which can never be deemed a hardship, while they are at liberty to avoid it. After all, even this inconvenience might be partly obviated by a proper system with regard to markets, very different indeed from the temporary expedients, and unjudicious restrictions, with which their freedom is now clogged.

On the whole, I look upon the late increase of London, as a natural consequence of the prosperity of the nation, and a sure token of its healthy and vigorous state, and cannot, with our gloomy politicians, foresee danger and calamity, from an evil, if it were one, that naturally checks itself. At the same time, I ardently wish for every improvement, in a moral, political, and æconomical sense, which this city is able to receive; and am convinced that the public works so much cherished at

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present will contribute in no small degree to those important ends. Canals, embankments, high roads, necessarily facilitate the transport of provisions and commodities; and the opening, paving, lighting, and removing nuisances from the streets and squares, certainly conduce to the health and security of the inhabitants. Nor are mere embellishments without their use. The refinement of taste in a nation never fails to be accompanied by a suitable refinement of manners; and people accustomed to behold order, decency, and elegance in public, soon acquire that urbanity in private, which forms at once the excellence and bond of society.

————— *Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes*

Emollit mores, nec finit esse feros.

It is the duty then of every good man to join in promoting these designs; indeed, if one may judge from the apparent

spirit of the times, the period is not far distant, when Great Britain will possess a capital, worthy of a nation which stands foremost in reputation, and is at once the dread and envy of Europe.

T H E E N D.

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